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The Iowa Banner

To the majority of the people of the United States, especially those in the states and territories created by the national government, the United States flag has typified their sense of group consciousness, their ideals, and the sovereignty of the United States. There was little demand for state flags in early days and to this indifference the Civil War added positive opposition, since state patriotism was looked upon as a threat of disunion.

The Spanish-American War, however, removed some of this prejudice and a succession of national expositions emphasized the desirability of distinctive state banners. Beginning about 1900 the various commonwealths not already provided with state flags began to adopt these emblems of a platonic state loyalty which did not suggest rivalry with the national sovereignty.

In no other state, probably, was there greater indifference to the significance of a state flag than in Iowa, due perhaps to the fact that the State was settled largely from other states and established its State government during the period of dissension preceding the Civil War. Gradually, however, there developed in certain groups a sentiment for a State flag and as early as 1913 an at-

tempt was made to secure the adoption of a State banner by legislative action. A commission was appointed but it failed to report in 1915 and was instructed to continue its work and report to the General Assembly in 1917. At this session the committee reported that in their opinion Iowa should have a flag but they had found no suitable design, and the legislature adjourned without further action.

In the meantime the United States entered the World War. It was expected that the Iowa men would fight in State regiments as they had in former wars and thus emphasized the desirability of a State flag to designate the Iowa units. The organization most interested in this matter was the Iowa Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution which had already prepared two designs. On May 11, 1917, Mrs. Lue B. Prentiss, chairman of the Society's flag committee, Mrs. Dixie Gebhardt, and a number of other interested persons appeared before the State Council of National Defense, presented a flag design submitted by Mrs. Gebhardt, and asked that it be adopted as the State flag for use by the Iowa soldiers. The Council approved the plan without much discussion. Thereupon the Daughters of the American Revolution had a number of flags manufactured and presented one to each of the Iowa National Guard regiments, one of which — as the 168th United States Infantry — was already in France.

The use of state flags, however, was soon rendered almost impossible by the policy adopted by the War Department of assigning men to military units without regard to the state from which they came.

The flag as first designed had an entirely white field but before any were manufactured Mrs. Gebhardt added a vertical blue stripe next the pole and a similar red stripe on the outer side, leaving the white field approximately as wide as the two colored stripes combined. On this center of white is the representation of an eagle, carrying in its beak a blue streamer on which is the motto from the Iowa State seal, "Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain." Below is the word "Iowa" in red letters.

There seems to have been little enthusiasm for the new State flag and but little opposition. Its official status was fixed in 1921 by a law approved on March 29th providing that the flag sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution should be the official State banner. The law also requires that if displayed with the Stars and Stripes the State banner should be placed beneath the national emblem.

RUTH A. GALLAHER